



In Pursuit of Protection: Advancing Refugee Women's Rights, Leadership and Participation through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the 1951 Refugee Convention

Side event during UN Women, Peace and Security week

Date: Wednesday 28 October

Time: 9:30AM – 11:00AM ET

Venue: Bahá'í International Community, 866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120, New York, NY 10017

Register [here](#) (registration deadline: 3PM ET, Friday 23 October)

Organizers: Women's Refugee Commission, Church World Service, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, New Women Connectors, Darfur Women Action Group, UNHCR, UN Women

Background

The world now faces the highest number of active armed conflicts since World War II. Meanwhile, forced displacement is at near-record levels, with 117 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. Women and girls displaced by conflict and persecution are facing repeated displacements and attacks on civilians, escalating rates of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, rollbacks on women's rights and gender equality, growing xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment, restricted and increasingly unsafe asylum pathways, and border externalization. Amidst record levels of military spending, global humanitarian assistance is in steep decline – leading to the rapid dismantling of critical humanitarian services for displaced women and girls.

The 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in 2025 and the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention in 2026 provide a timely opportunity to examine how the WPS agenda and the international refugee protection framework can more effectively reinforce one another.

These frameworks are also supported by wider international human rights and statelessness instruments, including CEDAW and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. These

conventions offer complementary frameworks and legal instruments to ensure protection, meaningful participation, and access to the essential rights and services which can enable displaced, conflict-affected women to live safe, dignified, and self-reliant lives. Yet the potential of these instruments have never fully been realized – instead, these milestone anniversaries have been met with some state and non-state actors actively seeking to dismantle or undermine both WPS commitments and legal obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention, while gender equality is stalled or regressing in 50% of countries.

Safe asylum pathways remain closed to millions of women and girls escaping conflict and persecution, who are instead forced to navigate dangerous journeys – across the Darién Gap, the Mediterranean, or the Andaman Sea. In practice, refugee and asylum-seeking women –from Myanmar to Sudan, Venezuela to Afghanistan, and beyond - continue to face barriers to accessing protection from refoulement and gender-based violence, documentation, services, livelihoods and meaningful participation in decisions affecting their protection and solutions.

The 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention provides an important opportunity to reaffirm the international refugee protection framework and examine how its implementation can better respond to the rights, priorities and leadership of refugee women and girls. At the same time, the Women, Peace and Security agenda offers an established framework for advancing women’s participation, protection and leadership across conflict prevention, peacebuilding and recovery. Despite their complementary objectives, refugee protection and WPS policies and processes are often developed and implemented separately. Refugee women may consequently remain insufficiently represented in WPS decision-making, while refugee responses and asylum systems do not always draw fully on WPS commitments relating to participation, prevention and recovery. Bringing these frameworks into closer dialogue can support more coherent, gender-responsive and accountable approaches to protection.

Purpose

The event will use the 75th anniversary year of the Refugee Convention to strengthen practical cooperation between refugee protection and the WPS agenda. Centering the expertise and leadership of women with lived experiences of displacement, the event will examine how the Refugee Convention and the WPS agenda can be applied in a mutually reinforcing manner to advance refugee women’s rights, protection, meaningful participation and leadership.

The event will convene a panel of experts who have lived experiences of displacement, or work closely to support refugee women, to:

- 1) Explore the intersections between the 1951 Refugee Convention and WPS frameworks;
- 2) Identify how refugee women distinctly experience the four pillars of WPS (prevention, protection, participation, and relief), and their leadership and expertise in these areas;
- 3) Consider opportunities for how refugee response plans, asylum systems, and WPS frameworks (such as National Action Plans, peacekeeping missions, or reporting mechanisms) can better inform each other to ensure strengthened protection systems for displaced women.

- 4) Offer practical ideas for how civil society actors, States, UN Security Council members, and UN agencies can strengthen protection and fulfillment of rights for refugee women.

Particular attention will be given to the role of refugee women in community-based protection, social cohesion and peacebuilding, as well as in shaping recovery, reintegration and sustainable solutions where conditions permit.

Expected outcomes

The event is expected to:

- Develop a shared understanding of the connections and gaps between refugee protection frameworks and implementation of the WPS agenda;
- Identify a concise set of practical recommendations for States, UN entities and civil society on strengthening the inclusion of refugee women in WPS and refugee policy processes;
- Increase recognition of the role and contribution of refugee women's leadership and contributions to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, recovery and sustainable solutions.
- Identify opportunities to reflect forced displacement and refugee women's priorities in National Action Plans, refugee response planning, asylum policy and relevant monitoring and reporting processes;
- Take forward recommendations, drawing on WPS frameworks and the expertise and priorities of displaced women, to inform UNHCR's High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection and Solutions in December 2026.

Suggested guiding questions

1. How can WPS policies and processes—including National Action Plans—better address forced displacement and ensure the meaningful participation of refugee women?
2. How can refugee response planning and asylum systems better integrate WPS commitments on participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery?
3. What concrete actions should States, UN entities and civil society take to strengthen the protection, leadership and sustainable resourcing of refugee women and refugee women-led organizations?

Format

The event will begin with a panel discussion followed by audience Q&A and discussion.

Moderator: Kellie Leeson, Vice President Programs & Partnerships, Women's Refugee Commission

- Opening remarks from UNHCR
- Expert panel of 4-5 women leaders who have lived experiences of displacement, or work closely to support refugee women
- Closing remarks from UN Women
- Audience discussion and Q&A